[Mr. Ben E. Jenkins]

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Life History [(?)] FOLKWAY

Mrs. Edgerton Arnold, P.W.

Mclennan County, Texas

District No. 8

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Mr. Ben E. Jenkins. Waco, Texas REMINISCENCES OF BEN E. JENKINS OF THE EARLY DAYS OF WACO

In 1862 there were only about four business houses of importance in Waco located in what was then known as “Rat Row.” The buildings were crude log cabins, each building having but one door hung from wooden hinges, and wooden latches were used. For safety each door had its chain and padlock.

People came to town in wagons, in those days wagons being scarce usually four and five families used the same wagon. Where the Square now stands was just open country dotted with trees and bushes and stock running loose.

During the war and for the first two years after its close we lived on what is now known as the William Cameron farm located on the Bosque road.

Library of Congress

The first school I attended was known as the Billie Walker place and the school was built on the top of the hill. The school house was just a little log cabin 16” X 18” feet. It had one door and no windows and was heated by a large fireplace. The seats were made from split logs with peg for legs. There were no desks nor blackboard, and all the children need slates. For books we had the old “Blue Back Speller” and McGuffy's “Reader.” Paper being scarce we were forced to be careful and not waste it. The pens were geese quills that each child made at home, and the ink was made from poke berries. C. 12 - 2/11/[?] Texas 2 Our teacher was Miss Minnie Blackwell, who came from one of the northern states, and in teaching us grammar she insisted that we pronounce the letter “J” and “K” making them sound as though we were saying jar and kar.

Our lunches consisted of a slice of corn bread, a piece of bacon, and a teacup of molasses. In place of paper bags we packed them in a two gallon bucket.

The first school that was anything like a High School was located on Bosqueville, and all the children in Waco attended the school there. Many of them had to walk to and from Waco each day. It is strange that they were forced to walk when the surrounding country was full of wild horses that could have easily been caught and tamed.

Our first house was built out near Speegleville, and was made from logs. I can well remember the first day we started to build the house. I went with my father to cut the logs and drag them to the cleared place with a yoke of oxen. He cut the logs down in a nearby woods, afterwards instructing me how to place the logs to build the foundation. After we had brought all the logs that were needed we invited the neighbors (and in those days our closest neighbor was ten miles distant) to come and help build the body of the house, as it took several men to lift the logs.

I shall never forget the day we went to drag in the logs. On our return from the woods we found that the cattle had eatin our dinner, and being five miles from home with only an ox

wagon, we had to go without food all day. That evening I thought we would never reach home. The oxen seemed slower than ever.

The furniture in our home was made from cottonwood, cedar, and 3 made by hand and homemade. Our beds had no springs nor slats. Holes were bored about six inches apart and ropes run through the holes making a checkered foundation. The ropes were made from spun hair from the tails of horses and cows. The Spanish horses had extremely long tails, and we used to lasso them and out the hair from their tails. We would also cut the bush from the cow tales and spin the hair into ropes and saddle girts. Our chairs were made of wood with raw hide seats.

In those early days every one owned a candle mold and made their own candles. Sometimes when we were out of candles, my mother would plait a string and put it into a saucer of grease leaving one end hanging out. Lighting that end to give light for the room. Our first lamp was little brass lamp without a globe.

Our clothing was made from cloth spun from the cotton and wool raised on our farm, spun and corded by hand. We had to pick the seeds from the cotton by hand and there were no gins. The men's suits were made from clothe which in those days was called “jean cloth” and the shirts were made from “hickory cloth.” My mother made the blankets from wool and all of the underwear, sheets, pillow cases, and towels were made from cotton.

Shoes were made by Mr. Callaway, the only shoe maker in this county. He tanned his own leather, and the tanning was far from perfect, for quite often patches of hair was left on the shoes. I was seven years old before I had my first pair of shoes.

A few months after our house was finished the neighbors organized and built a little Baptist Church at Speegleville. The first pastor 4 was Dr. Rufus Burleson. He held one Saturday and Sunday of every month. He did not receive money for his service but was

paid with corn meat, eggs, butter, and occasionally a load of wood. My grandmother met her payments by knitting all his suspenders and socks from wool.

After the Civil war was ended the people began coming to Waco from the old states and the building of the town began. Where Compton's Funeral Home now stands, was in thos days outside of Waco and was known as the old Prather home.

To keep the savage Comanche Indians away the Government stationed the Tonkaway Indians here. They were a kind and peaceful people and taught the white children many things of the Indian lore.

After the war, the freed negroes began to cause trouble and in 1866 the Ku Klux Klan was organized.

One of the things I am proud to remember was the courage shown by the women. In spite of hardships, the menace of the Indians, the danger from the savage animals prowling around, they seemed to feel no fear.

Food was plentiful as there were droves of wild turkeys and prairie chickens, and there was a large pond where the Cotton Palace now stands, filled with wild ducks.

Comparing Waco of today with the little village of those days makes me stop and think of the marvels that progress has made. 1 FOLKLORE

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Interview with Mr. B. E. Jenkins, Waco McLennan County, Texas.

Mr. B. E. Jenkins was born in Georgia, 1859. Twelve families left Rock Mart, Georgia in 1862 and came to Texas in ex-wagons. They were four months making the trip. One ox was lost on the road. Mr. Joseph Jenkins pulled in place of the ox for five miles, until they could buy another. They paid about ten dollars for an ox. The colony was led by B. L. Dehay, whose grand-son is Waco City Secretary. They came to East Waco and crossed in a ferry boat, where the new county bridge is, at the foot of Washington Avenue. They went to the Bob Wilson farm, now on Fifteenth and Herring, where Mr. Jenkins built a double log house of cedar. Mr. Jenkins later moved to Besqueville where he remained until the Civil war broke out.

War was brewing in Georgia at the time they sold out to come to Texas. They thought they would probably miss the war by coming to Texas. However they had been in Texas only a short time, about four months, when they were all conscripted, except a crippled man. They had to go back to Georgia to join the home regiment. The men went back to Georgia on horse back. Mr. Jenkins' mother, grand-mother and two aunts with five little boys from eight to twelve years of age were left in Texas. Most of the slaves in Georgia were sold. When the war broke out, Mr. Jenkins and his mother moved to the old Blocker farm which is now the summer home of Wm. Cameron on Bosque Bluff. With the help of Mr. Blocker, the slaves ran the farm. The farm was managed by an old colored man named Lewis Friday. Every one called his wife “aunty Creasy,” she would steal roasting-ears and bake pies and sweet potatoes and slip them to the boys unmindful of old Lewis. The five boys grew up like baby bears on the Bosque hills and cedar brakes especially Lover's Leap. The cedar brakes were full of wild Spanish goats which the boys tried to catch. They would hide up on Lover's Leap bluff and holler, the goats would jump over the bluff, and even

though the boys were like squirrels, they could not catch them. They would climb up the bluff from the bottom and dare the goat and each other to 2 jump. It was very dangerous, because the bluff was from fifty to seventy-five feet high. They would have just tow hold on the cliff, but they were little dare devils. The cattle and horses would run in every direction from the scent of Indians and thus warn the people. But the Indians around Waco were friendly. The white bushwhackers stole during the war. The settlers had to bury meat to hide it from them. His family ran out of salt during the war, so they dug up the dirt floor of the old smoke house boiled it and skimmed off the top to get the salt. They used parched wheat and corn meal for coffee. The second year of the war, they got coffee at Richey's store on Bridge Street. About one-thousand Tonkaway Indians were located at the Bosque bridge for about two years during the war. One very cold day, an Indian squaw came to the Jenkins home with two papooses, one naked and blankets around the other. Mrs. Jenkins put her dress on the squaw and dressed the children like white people. The next day, the squaw returned with the dress ripped up and made into a blanket.

The boys played with the Indians every day at that time Mr. Fannie Sparks was a girl and played with them. Indians taught them how to make a short bow and arrow. There were lots of white hopping-grasshoppers which had no wings. The Indians would catch these by bucket full and fry them crisp, put salt on them and eat them with pancakes. They would cook stacks of pancakes and pans of grasshoppers. The Indians would beg the boys to eat them, but they couldn't stand the idea. Turkeys, deer and prairie chickens were plentiful but they had to go to Coryell county for buffalo meat to eat. Dye for clothing was made from dry cedar and shumate bark. The spinning wheel and looms were used to make cloth for clothing. They raised a patch of cotton and a garden. The seed was picked from the cotton by hand, then the cotton was carded, spun and wove into cloth. The boys went barefooted and wore a big, long shirt something like a cotton-picking sack, they were only one garment until they were grown. They had no trouble about dressing. They wore underwear in winter but no shoes till after winter, and it had snowed some. Mr. Jenkins' mother bought green coffee and had to parch it in a skillet on the 3 fire-place, then beat

it with pestle. Coffee sold for four dollars a pound about the close of the war. There were no wood cook-stoves. Mrs. Jennings bought a “four-eyed” cook-stove from Mr. Richey, at the time there were only four houses on Rat Row, which is now Bridge Street. She learned how to “fire up that stove”, Mrs. Clinker, who lived in the edge of the cedar brake on what is now nineteenth Street at the old Tom Price home, got a stove and wouldn't use it. She sent for Mrs. Jenkins to show her how to “fire up” the stave and warm it up gradually as it might explode.

Two years after the war, Jenkins bought a farm, from Price Standifer, near Speegleville. We built a log house which had two large rooms and a shed, with puncheon-floor and clap board roof, fastened with peg fasteners. The doors were made out of puncheon boards, and there were wooden hinges; the windows had wooden shutters. There were two plank doors with wooden hinges and one window, but there were not any porches or steps. The furniture was home made. The bed had rope cord for spring. Their bed was somewhat better than most of the beds at that time, because it was a frame entirely separate from the wall. They used straw mattresses and feather beds to sleep on. They had just two home made chairs.

Mr. Jenkins married fifty-eight years ago. When he and his wife began housekeeping they started in a one-room log house and cooked on the fire place because there were very few stoves at that time. Mr. Jenkins still lives on the Old Prather farm, on the hill above Lake Waco where highway number 7 crosses highway number 67.